

GREECE CUSTOMS

Greetings:

Greeks are often expressive in their greetings. Friends and relatives hug and kiss upon meeting, while others shake hands.

Men often slap each other's back or arm at shoulder level instead of shaking hands.

People use a variety of verbal greetings; the situation dictates the greeting they choose. One term meaning "Good morning" is *Kaliméra*. "Good evening" is *Kalispéra*.

Gestures:

Gestures frequently are used among Greeks of a similar social status; using some gestures with superiors or elders may be improper.

To indicate "no," one tilts the head backward; nodding the head slightly forward means "yes."

Pointing a finger at someone is impolite; it often indicates a threat or contempt.

A person may release a puff of breath through pursed lips to ward off the jealousy of the "evil eye" after he or she has given or received a compliment.

People may also try to ward off the evil eye by repeating a short saying or performing a small ritual and prayer at home.

Holidays:

Easter is by far the most important holiday, celebrated with special feasts and processions.

Greeks celebrate 1 January as St. Basil's Day and as a traditional day to give gifts, although many people now prefer to exchange gifts on Christmas (25 Dec.).

For many holidays, a traditional greeting is *Chronia polla* (May you live for many years). At midnight on New Year's Eve, a special cake (*vasilopitta*) with a coin in it is cut into various pieces. Whoever gets the coin is supposed to have good luck during the new year.

Other holidays include Independence Day (25 Mar.), St. Constantine and Helen Celebration (21 May), Assumption (15 Aug.), and *Ochi Day* (28 Oct.). *Ochi Day* commemorates the day in 1940 that Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas said *Ochi* (No) to Hitler, and Greece entered into World War II on the side of the Allies. It is considered a heroic decision because of the size of the German and Italian armies.